

Wolves & Livestock

Montana's plan to conserve and manage the state's recovered gray wolf population was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in January 2004.

FWP works closely with USDA Wildlife Services (WS) the agency that investigates suspected wolf depredations and contributes its expertise to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts. Activities by FWP and WS and private citizens are guided by the state plan, state guidelines, and state law. Montanans are encouraged to contact FWP to:

- learn more about the wolves in their area;
- learn more about the what you can do to protect your livestock;
- seek assistance to avert or resolve a wolf-related conflicts.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the history of wolf caused losses?

From 1995 to 2007, WS confirmed 298 cattle, 461 sheep, 13 llamas, 24 goats, and 7 horses as being killed by wolves in the State of Montana. Other "unconfirmed" losses or missing livestock are not reflected in those totals. Research in Idaho indicated that wolf depredation was rare, but confirmed losses may be a fraction of actual wolf-caused losses incurred near active dens in densely forested and remote public land grazing allotments.

Cattle and sheep were killed most often between April and September, when grazing is most dispersed and young, vulnerable livestock are most common on the landscape. Small body size makes livestock more vulnerable to any predator. As such, wolves are capable of killing any sheep. Calves were more susceptible to wolf predation compared to adult cattle. However, wolves in the northern Rockies have occasionally killed adult-sized cattle and horses.

In response to these conflicts, combinations of lethal and non-lethal deterrents are used to minimize livestock losses and resolve conflicts. A total of 328 wolves have been killed in Montana from 1995-2007. Examples of proactive, non-lethal deterrents used by agencies and livestock producers include electric fencing, guarding/herding animals, fladry, increased human presence, night pens, and light or siren warning devices.

Preying on livestock appears to be a learned behavior. Most packs in Montana routinely encounter livestock, but do not attack livestock at each encounter. Some packs have been on the landscape for at least 12 years and are confirmed to have killed livestock a few times. A few packs depredated not long after established a territory. Still other packs depredated more frequently and demonstrated an escalating behavior pattern of actively hunting livestock. Each pack is unique and so is the local environment and conditions in which it lives. FWP and WS learn more about wolf-livestock interactions everyday.

What if wolves are on my property?

Most wolves in Montana cross private property sooner or later. Despite their usual wariness, wolves will use natural habitats in close proximity to people, particularly in rural areas. Wolves

occasionally habituate to home or ranch settings and sometimes will scent mark fence posts, vehicles, or farm/ranch equipment.

Biologists work with individuals and groups who have concerns about wolves and can also provide additional management tools such as rubber bullets, depending on the situation. By being prepared, you decrease your chances of having a problem and could keep a problem from getting worse.

Why report? Agency biologists monitor wolves, but wolves are great travelers and can move long distances quickly. Since management decisions are based, in part, on a pack's history and recent activities, your reports enable good decision-making. Your reports also help document wolf activity in new areas. Call before a problem arises, and tell your neighbors when you see wolves or wolf sign in the area.

What can I do to reduce the chance of losing livestock to wolves?

Wolves are opportunistic and usually look for vulnerable wild prey. However, some wolves 'learn' to prey on livestock and can teach this behavior to other wolves. FWP and WS can provide information about wolf-livestock interactions and information on non-lethal deterrents or harassment techniques.

Here are some other things to keep in mind:

- increased human presence may discourage wolves
- young or small animals are more vulnerable
- birthing livestock closer to outbuildings and not in distant pastures or open range helps you detect wolf activity sooner
- secure night pens and guard dogs help protect sheep, but guard dogs need human protection, too
- prompt removal or burial of carcasses helps prevent wolves or other wild animals from scavenging and eliminates a reason for them to stick around
- accurate records of turn out dates, number of livestock turned out, and number of livestock gathered at the end of the season establish a history; significant changes from one year to the next could be due to wolf-livestock conflicts

Some signs that livestock producers suggest may indicate that wolves are in the area:

- animals bunching together
- changes in herd temperament; livestock lifting their heads and smelling the air
- livestock breaking through sound fences
- livestock reacting differently around working dogs
- changes in livestock movement or grazing patterns

What about conflicts between dogs and wolves?

To a wolf, a dog is a trespassing "wolf" that should be driven away or killed. Wolves could be aggressive towards dogs any time, but especially during breeding season (January-February) and denning periods (April-May), or if wolf pups are nearby.

If a wolf approaches, bring your dog to heel at your side. Standing between a wolf and your dog usually ends an encounter, but do not try to break up a physical fight, as you may be

injured in the process. Since a wolf is curious and territorial at the same time, it may return to the area.

Do not leave dog food out. Keep your dog in a secure place at night such as a sturdy kennel, a barn, the garage, or the house. Report wolf-dog interactions to FWP.

What can I do if a wolf bothers my livestock?

Wolves sometimes “test” livestock by chasing them, similar to wild prey like deer and elk. Cattle losses usually occur as single animals, whereas sheep losses tend to be multiple animals per incident.

If you suspect a wolf of making a kill:

- preserve the scene and do not move the carcass;
- cover tracks, hair or scat with anything that protects the evidence; use a bucket, tarp, plywood, brush, or clothing;
- cover the carcass with a secured tarp to keep scavengers away and preserve bite marks or signs of bleeding;
- call WS immediately; a prompt investigation helps pinpoint the cause of death.

Montana livestock producers can non-injuriouly haze or harass a wolf, or kill a wolf that is seen actively killing or threatening to kill livestock or herding or guarding animals on both public or private land. The flexibility to protect livestock and herding or guarding animals is provided in Montana law and is in the defense of property statute that pertains to mountain lions or black bears caught damaging private property.

Similar to lions and black bears, a wolf seen actively biting, wounding, chasing, harassing, or attacking livestock or herding or guarding animals could be killed. Such incidents must be reported to FWP in 72 hours.

What can I do if a wolf bothers my domestic dogs used for companionship or hunting?

Owners of companionship or hunting dogs can non-injuriouly haze or harass a wolf, or kill a wolf that is seen actively attacking or killing domestic dogs on both public or private land. The flexibility to protect domestic dogs is provided in Montana law and is in the defense of property statute that also pertains to mountain lions or black bears. Such incidents must be reported to FWP in 72 hours.

How will decisions about problem wolves be made?

FWP decisions to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be made based the state's federally approved state plan, which describes an incremental management approach guided by wolf numbers, the location of conflicts, depredation history of the pack, potential for additional losses, and pack size. More detailed guidelines have been adopted by FWP and the FWP Commission.

Tools available to private citizens include: ability to non-injuriouly haze or harass wolves, kill wolves seen actively killing or threatening to kill livestock, and kill permits for confirmed depredations. FWP will still work with USDA Wildlife Services for a coordinated agency response when appropriate.

Will I be compensated for my livestock or herd dog losses?

The Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board and Program was established by the 2007 Montana Legislature to address economic losses due to wolf depredation. The Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board (LLRMB) is administratively attached to the Montana Department of Livestock. This board and program are funded by private donations and government sources.

Currently, the board is making compensation payments for confirmed and probable losses due to gray wolves. Payments will be made only for losses that have been investigated by USDA Wildlife Services.

When the investigation is complete, Wildlife Services will provide you with a copy of the investigative report. Attach a copy of this report to a completed Loss Reimbursement Application. All sections of the Loss Reimbursement Application must be completed in order to process an application for payment.

To report wolf activity, find out more about wolves in your area, or get help with prevention strategies, contact FWP:

Kent Laudon, Kalispell

(406) 751-4586 (w)

(406) 250-5047 (c)

klaudon@mt.gov

Val Asher, Bozeman

(406) 556-8514 (w)

(406) 581-3281 (c)

val.asher@retranches.com

Vacant, Butte

Liz Bradley, Missoula

(406) 542-5523 (w)

(406) 865-0017 (c)

lbradley@mt.gov

Mike Ross, Bozeman

(406) 994-6371 (w)

(406) 581-3664 (c)

mross@mt.gov

Carolyn Sime, Helena

(406) 444-3242 (w)

(406) 461-0587 (c)

casime@mt.gov

To report a suspected wolf depredation, contact USDA Wildlife Services:

John Steuber, Billings

(406) 657-6464 (w)

(406) 896-1143 (c)

Kraig Glazier, Helena

(406) 458-0106 (w)

(406) 439-5943 (c)

Jim Hoover, Columbus

(406) 322-4303 (w)

(406) 780-1485 (c)

To learn more about the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Program and the application process to get reimbursed, contact:

George Edwards, Helena

Loss Mitigation Coordinator, Montana Department of Livestock

(406) 444-5609

gedwards@mt.gov

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